The Undergraduate

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The Twelfth Annual
Newman Essay Awards

Homer
Lindsey Bogason
Mike Stanley

Greek Thought
Laura Hautala
Bryan Edwards

19th & 20th Century Thought
Angela Silletto
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Editorial: Journeying through Seminar
by Cathy Kwan

Participating in Collegiate Seminar has been an exciting and eye-opening journey for me. When I first stepped into my Greek Thought class, I was bewildered and frightened. I could not grasp how I was going to present my ideas effectively to other students by writing an essay on Homer or Aeschylus when I had never talked about these books before. After two weeks of reading and discussing Homer’s Odyssey, I realized that Homer was using his characters to stand for ideas and beliefs in ancient Greece. All I had to do was pay attention to what they did and what he said about them to understand what the work had to offer me.

It still amazes me how much insight I got from this epic poet, these playwrights, and these philosophers, both in fiction and in essays. These writers speak to our constantly changing world. Each day in Seminar became an adventure, each book, a challenge, each essay, an discovery. Although I have stumbled along the way, I have picked myself up each time and continued the journey—with guides like Virgil, Dante, Shakespeare, Woolf, King, Marquez, and Morrison.

Here’s another Seminar text the twelfth edition of the Newman Prize Essays, written by last year’s Greek and Modern Thought students. Each of these winning essays tries to prove one main point, its thesis, clearly and directly and we have put each thesis in bold-faced type so that you can see if it works. Each essayist has worked hard to transform abstract ideas into persuasive arguments with emphatic examples, offering a strong main point, clearly organized information, and awareness of opposing ideas.
Although they could be further improved, these essays can serve as inspirations and as models. As Circe says in *The Odyssey*, "I cannot advise you / which to take, or lead you through it all— / you must decide for yourself—" (XII 62-63). Let these writers guide you.

Lindsey Bogason offers a new perspective in "Odysseus' Scar Sign of His Life." She claims that Homer uses Odysseus' scar, inflicted by a wild boar, to demonstrate both his hero's courage and his pain. On the other hand, Mike Stanley questions Odysseus' credentials as an authentic epic hero; he argues that Odysseus could not have completed his voyage without Athena's help.

Also in Greek Thought, Laura Hautala explores the justice system in Aeschylus' *Libation Bearers*, while Bryan Edwards compares the changing standards of leadership in Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* and Plato's *Meno*. Hautala points out that, in Aeschylus' plays, guilt and punishment are determined by circumstances, rather than by the crime itself. Edwards measures Oedipus' leadership against Plato's virtues, finding that Oedipus, a selfish king, cares little for his own people.

In 19th & 20th Century Thought, Angela Siletto seeks the origins of capitalism. She finds that while Marx sees corruption and inequality in capitalism, Weber finds that Protestant moral values have been incorporated into business ethics, but have lost their religious force.

All of us who try to express a strong point in our essays strive to speak as forcefully on the page as we do in
conversation. Even if your journey, like Odysseus’ famous one, is filled with pitfalls and monsters, along the way you will discover your own, fresh voice. Now comes your turn to create essays, analyze passages, and aim your ship for next year’s Newman Essay Contest.

Boys awaiting initiation before the sphinx on her column.
Athenian Pelike Painting.
Bronze Youth
350 B.C.
Athens National Museum
Odysseus' Scar: Sign of His Life

by Lindsey Bogason

In the epic poem, *The Odyssey*, Homer gives us an abundance of information about the hero, Odysseus, and tells us about many events that happen to him on his voyage home. Homer gives us contrasting ideas about Odysseus he is brave yet weak; faithful but at times unfaithful to his wife; heroic yet greedy. Because of all these conflicting tidbits about Odysseus, the reader does not know how to comprehend his character. To help solve this problem, Homer occasionally breaks off into vignettes where he tells us a story about Odysseus. Although these stories may seem annoying or long-winded, in reality they provide us with material for new insights into Odysseus' character. The story of how Odysseus got his scar gives us a deeper understanding of his character. The anecdote of the scar lets us look into his past, offering some straight-forward facts to help us appreciate the hero of *The Odyssey*.

Odysseus got the scar when he was a young lad off to visit his grandfather, Autolycus, and his sons. Together, the group went on a hunting expedition where they encountered a rambunctious boar. Odysseus charged the feisty animal and killed it, but not before the boar could give him a nasty scar. The story of the scar gives the reader insight into Odysseus' character: he is destined to endure pain, act bravely, and be loved by many.

The anecdote of the scar gives us the history of Odysseus' name. When he was born, Autolycus came to visit his daughter and her new son. His daughter then prompted Autolycus to name his grandchild "The Son of Pain":

The scar gives the reader insight.
Just as I
have come from afar, creating pain for many—
men and women across the good green earth—
so let his name be Odysseus . . .
the Son of Pain, a name he’ll earn in full.
(XIX, 460-464)

This speech shows that even just after Odysseus was born,
he was destined to endure much pain throughout his life.
His grandfather named him this because he must have
suspected that Odysseus would lead a harsh life filled with
troubles. Until this incident with the boar, we wonder why
the hero of this poem must be subjected to so many
difficulties a long, hard-fought battle, the wrath of the
powerful god Poseidon, a ten year voyage home, and a
battle with over a hundred men just to gain entrance to his
own home. After we read the story of the scar, we see that
Odysseus’ troubles have been destined since the day he was
born. Throughout the poem, Odysseus either gives or
receives pain. He even gives pain to those he loves to
Penelope, who waits for his homecoming for twenty years,
saddened by the fact he has not returned; to his mother,
Anticleia, who dies of grief because she assumes he is dead;
and to his dog, Argus, who dies just as he returns home.

The story of the scar also shows us that Odysseus has
been courageous since he was a young man. When
Autolycus and his sons went on their hunting expedition,
they encountered the belligerent boar

. . . his eyes flashing fire
and charging up to the hunt he stopped, at
bay—and Odysseus rushed him first,
shaking his long spear in a sturdy hand,  
wild to strike but the boar struck faster,  
lunging in on the slant, a tusk thrusting up  
over the boy's knee, gouging a deep strip of  
flesh.

(XIX, 504-510)

In this passage, not only do we peruse an interesting and  
involving story, but we also learn that Odysseus is truly  
brave. While the rest of the hunting group waits in the  
background to see what kind of moves the boar will make,  
Odysseus courageously charges the boar and kills it. He  
risked his own safety for the thrill of the hunt. Now, whenever  
he or his loved ones see the scar the boar left, they can  
remember the thrilling story behind it. It also alerts people to  
the presence of a brave and heroic warrior.

He risks his own safety for the thrill of the hunt.

The incident of the scar and events surrounding it  
also show the reader that Odysseus is beloved by many.  
When Odysseus first arrives for his visit with his  
grandparents, the author tells us that "Autolycus warmed  
him in / with eager handclasps, hearty words of welcome/  
His mother's mother, Amphithea, hugged the boy/ and  
kissed his face and kissed his shining eyes" (XIX, 470-473).  
When reading The Odyssey, we wonder how Odysseus'  
contemporaries feel about him. This passage shows the  
excitement and joy his presence brings people. When  
Odysseus comes to visit, his hosts always throw a huge  
banquet for him and indulge him. Odysseus is appreciated  
and loved by many.

In The Odyssey, the tale of Odysseus' long journey  
home is illustrated in great detail; Homer gives us many
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 contrasting views of Odysseus’ character. Occasionally, the epic poet embeds a richly described story, taking us off on a surprising tangent. These stories are valuable to the reader because they provide an in-depth look at Odysseus. Most notably, the story of the scar shows the reader that Odysseus is brave, beloved, and destined to endure pain. Therefore, the story is more than a long-winded digression from the poem; on the contrary, it provides a necessary respite from Odysseus’ present struggles.

Work Cited


*This essay was written for Michael Walensky and Glenna Breslin’s Greek Thought Seminar.*
Odysseus: Hero or Coward?
by Mike Stanley

Since my youth, the media has constantly flooded me with images of reputed heroes. I have noticed these supposed heroes follow a certain pattern. The handsome protagonist kills the bad guy, saves the world, and gets the equally attractive girl. It does not matter what the odds against the character are, or if he only has two bullets left in his gun. The fact is, he will win. Because Odysseus follows this same mold, he is the heroic archetype. These images of heroes, whether in a book or on television, do not present an accurate image of a hero. Realizing I did not have a working definition of a hero, I turned to Webster’s Dictionary, which defines a hero as someone willing to take great personal risks to help someone else, or someone who does something worthy of great accolade.

Recently, in the wake of the tragedy at the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, many ordinary people have become great heroes. One particular case stood out to me; a doctor walking to work saw one of the hijacked planes plow into the World Trade Center. Without thinking of his own welfare, he rushed into the rubble and began treating injured people. Someone willing to risk his life for others without thinking of anything other than those people is a hero. Now we have a model, against which we can compare people who are reputed to be heroes. This doctor worked tirelessly, attempting to pull as many people from the rubble as possible; he could have easily ended up paying the ultimate price to help someone else live. Using this brave New Yorker as a model of what an ideal hero should be, I must say that Odysseus is not a hero.
Although Homer's Odysseus stands first in a long line of literary heroes, he actually represents the false heroic ideals still used by storytellers. Although Odysseus performs many courageous acts, he cannot truly be called a hero because his actions are never selfless he always has an ulterior motive. Odysseus is a trickster who uses deceit to get what he wants, not a hero who wants to help others. Odysseus wanders the seas for ten years due to his overwhelming pride. Therefore, we must realize that he is not a hero because he, himself, creates the very obstacles he is forced to overcome. Even his pride is misplaced because without Athena's assistance at every crucial moment, he would not have completed his mission.

Every time Odysseus finds himself in a difficult position, Athena delivers him from the danger. In at least three instances, Athena plays a pivotal role in his survival and return to Ithaca. Without Athena's pleading, Odysseus would have been stuck on Calypsos island:

But my heart breaks for Odysseus, that seasoned veteran cursed by fate so long—far from his loved ones still, he suffers torments off on a wave-washed island rising at the center of the seas.

Olympian Zeus, have you no care for him in your lofty heart? Did he never win your favor with sacrifices burned beside the ships on the broad plains of Troy?

(I, 57-60; 72-75)
Athena shows deep concern for Odysseus. Perhaps she identifies with him because they both use trickery to accomplish their goals. She uses Poseidon's absence from Olympus to convince Zeus that perhaps it is time to allow Odysseus to return home. Athena's argument on Odysseus behalf sets his return journey into motion. Without her convincing words to her father, Odysseus would never have been able to begin his trip home because he was so caught by Calypso's spell.

Again and again throughout the poem, Athena plays a crucial role in Odysseus success. When Odysseus washes ashore in Phaeacia, he encounters Nausicaa, the princess, whom Athena sends to the river where he is napping. As Odysseus, covered in brine, climbs out to investigate, Homer tells us: "Only Alcinous' daughter held fast, for Athena planted / courage within her heart" (VI, 153-154). Tactful Athena uses her cunning to make sure that the princess Nausicaa will help Odysseus continue on his journey home. Her father, the king, and the other nobles of Phaeacia heap treasures upon Odysseus, ultimately helping him home to Ithaca, with their magical ships! We see here again that without Athena's intervention at crucial moments, Odysseus would not be able to return home.

When Odysseus finally reaches home, Athena is waiting for him. Athena first helps him by disguising him as a poor beggar. Odysseus then asks her to craft a scheme to kill the suitors in his household "Come, weave us a scheme so I can pay them back! /Stand beside me, Athena ..." (XIII, 442-443). True heroes can accept help when necessary, but Odysseus relies on Athena to do almost everything for him. Without her help at these three critical junctures in the story,
Odysseus almost certainly would not have been able to return home and regain his wife, son, and household.

Homer gives us a glimpse into Odysseus’ overwhelming hubris when the “hero” taunts the Cyclops, saying, “Cyclops— / if any man on the face of the earth should ask you / who blinded you, shamed you so—say Odysseus, / raider of cities, he gouged out your eye” (IX, 558-561). Odysseus insists on making sure that the Cyclops knows who blinded him. He is not content to outsmart the Cyclops and escape with most of his men. He has to make sure that his deeds are attributed to him. A true hero should be selfless. The feat of outsmarting the Cyclops and escaping without the Cyclops’ knowing his enemy would have been an heroic feat. If Odysseus could have done it all without Athena’s help, he would be a hero. But, he is not satisfied to merely survive he wants credit for outsmarting the Cyclops.

If Poseidon answered his son’s prayer for the punishment of Odysseus, Odysseus would be forced to wander the seas for years and all his men would die. We see again that Odysseus does not care about his men’s survival when he takes his men past the Scylla with six heads. When six of his men are eaten, one by each head, he shows little concern for their deaths. Odysseus has only one mission, a single unwavering goal to return home to Ithaca. He does not care what he has to sacrifice to get there.

A heroic reputation seems to be very important to Odysseus. We see him constantly wanting to be recognized as a great man by the way he introduces himself to others. He is always Odysseus, conqueror of cites, or raider of cities, or something else along those lines. Even in Phaecia,
Odysseus cannot help but hint at his past accomplishments. When a young Phaecian noble questions his athletic ability, he feels compelled to reveal his "greatness," saying

\[ \ldots \text{how to handle a fine polished bow,} \ldots \]

\[ \text{Philoctetes alone outshot me there at Troy when ranks of Achaean archers bent their bows.} \]

(VIII, 246, 250-251)

He cannot bear to have someone fail to recognize his greatness. Even when a young man scorns him, he cannot close his mouth and let it go. If he were a true hero, he would not need the approval of others to make himself feel mighty.

As stated earlier, heroes are not out for themselves, but out to help others. Odysseus does not ever seem to have his men's well-being in mind, only his own personal wishes. In *The Odyssey*, we rarely see Odysseus take steps to ensure the safety of his soldiers, or even to mourn them when they die, with the exception of when he travels back to Circe's island to bury Elpenor. But this one generous act hardly qualifies Odysseus as a hero.

Although Odysseus has many heroic qualities, his actions in *The Odyssey* do not qualify him as a hero. He uses trickery to achieve his goals. He cannot stop bragging about his accomplishments at almost every critical juncture of the story. He relies on Athena for help and does not have much compassion for others, leading us to the conclusion that Odysseus, as portrayed in *The Odyssey*, is not a hero. In *The*
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*Odyssey*, we see a broken man who just wants to get home at any cost, not a hero. Although Odysseus can serve as a model for perseverance against great odds, he only cares about returning home to his wife and son, not about the men he is supposed to protect. Unlike the brave men and women who rushed into the rubble of the World Trade Center, Odysseus lacks courage. He lacks concern for others and lacks humility. Too often, he relies on divine intervention. If he were a modern hero, he would give everything to serve others and ensure their survival.

Work Cited


This essay was written for Bob Gardner's Greek Thought Seminar.
Crime and Punishment in Greek Tragedy:
Justice Removes Her Blindfold

by Laura Hautala

Clytemnestra and Orestes each commit murder in the name of vengeance in Aeschylus' *The Oresteia*. Yet it appears that some murders are acceptable in Greek tragedy while others are condemned. Clytemnestra is killed for her crime while Orestes is absolved. The differing fates of the two murderers reflect a curious lack of blind justice under the law, which merits an exploration of their crimes. Identical crimes could receive differing punishments. Guilt and punishment in Greek tragedy are not determined by the crime itself, but by the context surrounding the culprit's actions.

Orestes' actions are understandable from the outset. Only out of his duty to the dead and to the mandates of the gods does he act against a law he would normally respect. Orestes is outraged by his father's murder and betrayal. Although matricide is forbidden by the gods, Apollo drives him to take vengeance on his mother with the threat of a terrible curse:

... assaults of Furies spring to life on the father's blood ...

You can see them—
the eyes burning, grim brows working over you in the dark—
the dark of the sword of death! — your murdered kinsmen
pleading for revenge.

*(Libation Bearers 288-292)*
The sway of Apollo’s threat shows itself when Orestes has second thoughts, calling to his friend “What will I do, Pylades? — I dread to kill my mother!” Pylades responds, “What of the Prophet God Apollo, / the Delphic voice, the faith and oaths we swear? / Make all mankind your enemy, not the gods” (Libation Bearers 886-889). Only after Apollo reminds Orestes about the curse, does he acquire the strength to disregard the unseemliness of the act and murder his mother. He further demonstrates his commitment Apollo’s mandate when Clytaemnestra threatens him with her own curse, and Orestes snaps back, “But how to escape a father’s [curse] if I fail?” (Libation Bearers 912). With this riposte, he declares that the threat of the Furies sent by his father and murdered kinsmen far outweighs Clytaemnestra’s own curse.

*Clytaemnestra acts out of personal bitterness.*

Clytaemnestra is not so easy to pardon because she cannot provide motives such as Orestes’ that show concern for the dead and the will of the gods. Though she tries to make Agamemnon’s sacrifice of their daughter, Iphigeneia, and Agamemnon’s infidelity a viable justification for murder, these motives prove unreliable. Clytaemnestra unwittingly admits that Agamemnon should be excused for killing their daughter by saying that when he reaches the underworld, Iphigeneia will “fling her arms around her father, / pierce him with her love” (Agamemnon 1586-7). If Iphigeneia, the true victim of Agamemnon’s sacrifice, could forgive her father, then Clytaemnestra does not need to avenge her death. Therefore, Clytaemnestra is not acting on behalf of her daughter, but out of personal bitterness. Her second motive, regarding Agamemnon’s infidelity with Cassandra is even more dubious because Clytaemnestra herself has taken Aegisthus as her lover. Speaking about
Cassandra, she claims angrily “And here his spear-prize...what wonders she beheld! — / the seer of Apollo shared my husband’s bed” (Agamemnon 1468-9). But Clytaemnstra’s own infidelity renders such accusations hypocritical.

Although Clytaemnstra and Orestes appear to employ identical means for their respective murders, they have different motives. Not only do Clytaemnstra and Orestes commit their murders physically in the same manner, they also achieve their crimes by deceiving their intended murder victims with lies to win their trust. However, Clytaemnstra uses deceit to disguise her dishonorable motives of personal gain. She attempts to fool Agamemnon by claiming to have suffered miserably without him. With histrionic style, Clytaemnstra complains

when a woman sits at home and the man is gone, the loneliness is terrible, unconscionable

......

...... There were times they cut me down and eased my throat from the noose. I wavered between the living and the dead.

(Agamemnon 848-850, 862-4)

Clearly, she did not spend the Trojan War pining for the safe return of her husband, since she took Aegisthus as her lover in Agamemnon’s absence, and then murders the man she claims to have missed so much. In reality, she spent her time plotting his murder, with the ambition traditionally attributed to men. As she later admits, “I brooded on this trial, this ancient blood feud / year by year” (Agamemnon
1396-7). Agamemnon points out his wife’s uncanny thirst for power before he is even aware of her plot to kill him. He nails down her true motives, commenting, “And where’s the woman in all this lust for glory?” (Agamemnon 935).

Orestes is ultimately more justified in using deceit to kill his victim because he uses it to protect his own life while serving Apollo. He must lie to Clytaemnestra about his identity in order to gain admittance to her house because he has learned from Agamemnon’s example that his mother is not the kindest of hostesses to her returning family members. Had he admitted to being the exiled son of Clytaemnestra, a woman who gained her power through the murder of her own husband, he would not have lived long enough to raise a weapon against his mother. That Clytaemnestra and Orestes use identical means suggests that the ancient Greeks gave special consideration to the goals achieved by deceit when judging human actions. They do not forbid deceit outright, but give humans the discretion to use it where they see fit.

Here they see Orestes’ use of deceit as permissible because he is serving a god and saving his own life. Clytaemnestra’s motives for personal power become clear in the aftermath of her crime. In her defense against the Chorus’ accusations, she reveals her belief that, she was destined to purge the house of its murderous history and take command of the kingdom. She compares herself to the embodiment of the curse of Atreus, saying of this curse:

... I embrace his works,
    cruel as they are but done at last,
if he will leave, our house
in the future, bleed another line
with kinsmen murdering kinsmen.
(Agamemnon 1597-1601)

Clytaemnestra feels that Agamemnon's murder will appease the spirit of vengeful murder that haunts the house, giving her free reign over the kingdom. She demonstrates her belief further when she says of the Chorus members "Let them howl—they're impotent. You and I have power now. / We will set the house in order once for all" (Agamemnon 1707-8). Clytaemnestra claims with this statement that she can ignore the accusations of the Chorus because she has gained the throne and created power in a house haunted by a curse. She did not murder Agamemnon in direct service to the curse of Atreus, but rather used the curse as a vehicle for her own ambitions. Her claim that she has meted out Agamemnon's destiny falls flat because she used his "destined" death to take the throne for herself.

After he murders Clytaemnestra, Orestes appears more deserving of pardon than his mother because he shows humility and fear of the gods; while Clytaemnestra showed only brazen pride. Orestes serves Clytaemnestra her destiny, as she claims to have done for Agamemnon; but afterwards he takes no glory for himself. Instead he flees to Apollo's shrine to be purged, saying, "I must escape this blood ... it is my own. / —Must turn towards his hearth, / none but his, the Prophet God decreed" (Libation Bearers 1036-1038). With this action, Orestes shows that he respects the god who ordered him to murder, whereas Clytaemnestra claimed all honor for herself. When Orestes is faced with the Furies, "the hounds of mother's hate," he makes no effort to defend
himself as did Clytaemnestra did, when the Chorus accused her of wrongdoing. The leader of the Chorus actually tries to convince Orestes he is justified, saying, “You of all men, / you have your father’s love. Steady, nothing / to fear with all you’ve won” (Libation Bearers 1051-1053). But Orestes will not rest until he is purged. He admits he has committed a crime and needs cleansing, while Clytaemnestra erroneously claims to have cleansed the house with her crime.

The key factor determining the murderers’ eventual condemnation or absolution lies in their motives. Although both Clytaemnestra and Orestes use murder and see themselves as destined to commit their murders, their motivations for fulfilling their perceived destinies differ radically. Clytaemnestra wants power for herself, while Orestes wants to serve the gods and the dead. Therefore, murder is acceptable in Greek tragedy, if a hero uses it to serve a higher purpose and not for personal gain. Ironically, this idea places justice in the arbitrary hands of the Greek gods, who never make their will completely clear to the humans of Greek mythology. This arbitrary justice raises a new question How can the characters of Greek tragedy live justly, if justice fluctuates with the whims of the gods?

Work Cited


This essay was written for John Dennis’ Greek Thought Seminar.
Greek warrior with the visor of his helmet drawn over his face
Plato's Recipe for a "Good" Leader
by Bryan D. Edwards

The real leader has no need to lead—he is content to point the way.
Henry Miller, The Wisdom of the Heart

In the Meno, Plato states, "a man's virtue consists of being able to manage public affairs and in so doing to benefit his friends and harm his enemies and to be careful that no harm comes to himself" (Plato 4, 71e). Clearly, Meno has identified virtue as leadership, making it clear that a leader should be concerned with the outcome of his actions. Through no fault of his own, Meno makes a common mistake when he analyzes how self-interest can influence a leader's actions. In challenging this common oversight, Socrates asks Meno, "Consider this further point: you say that virtue is to be able to rule. Shall we not add to this justly and not unjustly?" (Plato 6, 73d). Plato is questioning the manner in which a leader must choose to rule.

It becomes clear, then, that in order for a leader to be viewed as a "good" leader, he must be willing to make decisions with the interest of the community in mind, sacrificing his own interest for the greater good when the necessity arises. A leader who lacks these qualities could not lead effectively.

Sophocles discusses Oedipus' downfall as the king of Thebes because he cannot lead selflessly. When he hears that the previous king of Thebes was murdered and that the murderer had never been found, Oedipus, as king, is called to settle the issue. He attempts to abolish the "pollution" in the minds of the community:
For when I drive pollution from the land
I will not serve a distant friend's advantage,
but act in my own interest. Whoever he was
that killed the king may readily wish to dis
patch me with his murderous hand; so helping
the dead king I help myself.

(Oedipus the King 136-141)

Oedipus, largely concerned with himself, does not seem to
act in the best interest of Thebes. Instead, he has become
passionate about preserving his position and reputation as
king.

Immediately, Oedipus begins the search for the king's
murderer. In his attempts to find the villain, Oedipus ad-
dresses the community:

I became

a citizen among you, citizens—
now I proclaim to all the men of Thebes:
who so among you knows the murderer

command him to tell everything
to me.

(Oedipus 223-227)

Although Oedipus seems to be asking the citizens to point
out the killer, this is certainly no way to lead an organized
community. The natural tendency is to point fingers and to
look for immediate answers, but should this be so for Oedi-
pus, a leader who must lead and unite his community?
We can relate Oedipus' habit of "jumping to conclusions" to Meno's quick definition of virtue. Socrates emphasizes rationality in defining virtue: "perhaps you knew before you contacted me, but now you are certainly like one who does not know. Nevertheless, I want to examine and seek together with you what it [virtue] may be" (Plato 13, 80c-d). Although Socrates confuses Meno, frustration is the goal of his exercise. If we can use what we know to inquire further—even if it leads to confusion—then we will be actively seeking a rational, rather than emotional, answer or conclusion.

Applying this rational process to leadership, we can see Oedipus' mistake. Instead of asking them to turn against each other—stirring more fear of the "pollution"—Oedipus should have taken a rational approach to investigation. Clearly, reason would have enabled him to lead without leaving his people in the dark. In fact, his initial rashness perpetuates his leadership problems.

With the community losing faith in his ability to lead, and with the prophecy stating that he was the murderer, Oedipus becomes self-conscious and insecure. Seeing himself as a target for overthrow, he accuses Creon, his longtime friend, of conspiracy:

Wealth, sovereignty and skill outmatching skill for the contrivance of an envied life!  
Great store of jealousy fill your treasury chests, if my friend Creon, friend from the first and loyal, thus secretly attacks me, secretly desires to drive me out . . .

( Oedipus 380-386)
The Undergraduate

The Chorus censures Oedipus for his unproductive and irrational remarks: “We need no angry words but only thought / how we may best hit the God’s meaning for us” (Oedipus 405-406). These members of the community understand that their leader must stop acting on his emotion in order to find what the prophecy has in store for the community—not just him!

A good leader would listen to such advice. Oedipus, however, simply ignores it and continues to blame Creon for his misfortunes:

You, sir, how is it you come here? Have you so much brazen-faced daring that you venture in my house although you are proved manifestly the murderer of that man, and though you tried, openly, highway robbery of my crown?

(Oedipus 531-535)

Internalizing the situation to the point of obsession, Oedipus develops a twisted idea that Creon created the “pollution” in his attempt to steal the crown. Countering Oedipus’ accusation, Creon explains that he does not want or need the crown. Rather, he wants to learn how to handle responsibility as a king would:

I was not born with such a frantic yearning to be a king—but to do what kings do. And so it is with every one who has learned wisdom and self-control

. . . . .

I am not so besotted yet that I want other honours than those that come with profit.

(Oedipus 588-595)
Creon explains that Oedipus is also betraying him as a friend: "To throw away / an honest friend is, as it were, to throw / your life away, which a man loves the best" (Oedipus 611-613). If a king cannot have faith in a friendship that has lasted for many years, how can the community have faith in his rule?

When he realizes that he was the murderer, Oedipus begins a downward spiral of separation from the community. Ashamed, he states, "May I be gone out of men's sight before / I see the deadly taint of this disaster / come upon me" (Oedipus 832-834). Later, seeing his wife dead, he takes the broach from her robe and stabs his eyes until he is blind, so that he will not have to face the community (Oedipus 1235-128). To further add to his separation from leadership, he asks to be led out of Thebes and to be left alone (Oedipus 1288-1297).

His emotional and irrational reactions to these issues are understandable. However, an effective leader cannot indulge his self-interest when the community's well-being is at stake. Because the community seeks guidance from a leader, he must put aside these emotional feelings in order to actively and rationally solve the issues.

In Plato's dialogue, Socrates seems to be showing Meno the effectiveness of leading over teaching. Socrates states: "Look then how he will come out of his perplexity while searching along with me. I shall do nothing more than ask questions and not teach him" (Plato 17, 84c-d). Socrates guides Meno as Oedipus should lead Thebes.
By questioning Meno, Socrates shows the importance of letting the pupil work through the learning process. Instead of ruling a community, a leader should act as a guide. Oedipus should have calmly and objectively figured out a way to serve the community.

A leader must understand what it means to "lead" rather than "rule." A leader must understand that he cannot make decisions for his own benefit. The "good" leader walks beside, not in front of his community. Leading in this manner will result in a more productive community. A leader lives a difficult life. Thus, it takes a special individual, with a special talent to be an effective and just leader.

Works Cited


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The Ethics of Capitalism: Marx to Weber

by Angela Silletto

In “Wage-Labour and Capital,” Karl Marx clearly details the injustice and inequality he sees in the modern capitalist system. When our eyes are opened to injustice, it is natural to ask where the ideas behind capitalism came from. According to Max Weber, the answer is, ironically, religion. Although Weber explains—in his essay “The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism”—that old Protestant ethics gradually developed into the modern spirit of capitalism, in the process, Protestant ethics became separated from its religious roots. Both Weber and Marx examine the negative effects of the separation of ethics from capitalism.

In the modern capitalist state, Weber claims that “man is dominated by the making of money, by acquisition as the ultimate purpose of his life” (53). Although he may oversimplify, it is true that “Materialism results from the secularization of all ideals through Protestantism” (40). He does not claim that Protestants were directly responsible for the heartlessness of the capitalist system, for he stresses the fact that the founders of Protestantism would be appalled at how their religion has mutated. Rather, the values formerly held by Protestants gradually changed as their ethics were separated from their religion.

Primarily, the Protestant belief in a “calling” as a life’s task led to the development of the capitalist spirit. Luther was the first to use this term in order to define “the fulfillment of duty in worldly affairs as the highest form which the moral activity of the individual could assume” (80). Luther developed this concept of worldly duties being “the only way to live acceptably to God” in response to his disgust
with the monastic way of life which renounced such duties; conversely, he saw glorified labor in a calling as “the outward expression of brotherly love” (81). The spirit of hard work this inspired was not in any way directed towards the idea of progress (45); instead, it was intended to stress the importance of the actual work as an end in itself. After all, one’s calling was a “task set by God” (85). The original Protestants would have seen modern capitalism as “the lowest sort of avarice and as an attitude entirely lacking in self-respect” (56).

Protestant dedication to work gradually developed into the spirit of capitalism. The reason behind one’s devotion to a calling was eventually forgotten, and all that remained was this work ethic. Rather than seeing “work” as

“So This Is What We Died For”
Honore Daumier. 1831-35
an end in itself, the product of work became an end in itself: Money has now become the fundamental basis of the capitalist system, the spirit of capitalism, as defined by Weber (52).

Out of the idea of work as a "calling," came the basic elements of the capitalist spirit. The Protestant ethic of abstaining from distractions from the calling also became confused and distorted. Wasting time, once a sin, because "only activity serves to increase the glory of God," meant time was money in the spiritual sense (157-158). Years later, Benjamin Franklin expressed the same moral in his famous maxim: "time is money." Time spent away from working meant wasting money (48). Accumulation of money became all-important in life; pleasure was avoided not out of a desire to serve God, but a desire to earn money.

In addition, Protestant ethics, now separated from its roots, contributed to the spirit of greed. Luther's original intent in defining a "calling" was to teach acceptance of one's duties in life, and therefore to stay with the calling one was given by God. Later on, however, the common belief came to be that a change of "calling" was acceptable, if it would be more pleasing and useful to God. Any opportunities were to be taken, for it was required to "accept His gifts and use them for Him when He requireth it" (162). Therefore, an opportunity for greater "usefulness" in a job, as well as the accumulation of wealth which accompanied it was justified; only the spending of it was frowned upon. Protestantism fought not against "the rational acquisition, but against the irrational use of wealth" (171). Once again, however, the importance of pleasing God was gradually forgotten, and instead the accumulation of wealth eventually gave
way to spending: "these Puritaniical ideals tended to give way under excessive pressure from the temptations of wealth" (174).

The ethics of Protestantism were naturally and easily adapted to the spirit of the capitalist system. Although Protestants became more successful as a result of their background, Weber notes that the most successful people are frequently not religious: "Wherever riches have increased, the essence of religion has decreased in the same proportion" (175). As the moral purpose of work" was forgotten, religion became separated from the capitalist spirit it had contributed to, leaving only the shell: "The idea of duty in one’s calling prowls about in our lives like the ghost of dead religious beliefs" (180).

Marx also examines the effect of the separation of ethics from religion. Like Weber, Marx sees a loss of the values behind work. Work no longer serves the higher purpose of glorifying God; instead, it enforces dreary life. By selling their "labor-power" to the capitalist system, workers no longer have a personal investment in their labor. Rather than fulfilling a divinely ordained calling, a person’s "life-activity . . . is but a means of securing his own existence" (Marx 19). Furthermore, workers do not reap the benefits of the labor to which they contribute. They do not produce anything for themselves out of their work. Their "calling," now so devoid of meaning, has become an abstract concept of "wages" (19).

Marx’s depiction of the separation of ethics from religion is even more negative than Weber’s. While Weber notes the fact that now man’s purpose in life is simply to
make money, Marx comments on the hopelessness and futility of the system; a man's labor power becoming nothing but a commodity in the capitalist machine, compelling him now to strive only to survive. Whereas Weber describes the separation of ethics from religion in terms of capitalist development, Marx focuses more on its effect on the common laborer and society.

Weber notes that people are simply born into the capitalist system: "The capitalistic economy of the present day is an immense cosmos into which the individual is born, and which presents itself to him ... as an unalterable order of things in which he must live" (54). Marx has an even stronger viewpoint; he feels that the current economic conditions have led to a "slavery of the workers" (16). Just as Weber shows that there is no choice in being born into the system, Marx shows that there is also no choice in escaping the system. The harder a man works, the more he works against himself, for he is merely contributing further to the
capitalist system and widening the gap between himself and his oppressors (Marx 45). "The labour-power of the wage-labourer can exchange itself for capital only by increasing capital, by strengthening that very power whose slave it is" (32).

The workers, therefore, suffer inequality as a result of the capitalist system. Even if workers earn more money, "the social gratification which they [can] afford has fallen in comparison with the increased pleasures of the capitalist" (33). It is an endless cycle of injustice to which the workers are not intentionally contributing, just as Protestants did not intentionally create the system. The irony is that the miserable conditions, which Marx notes all developed out of religious ethics taken out of context.

Although Weber discusses the development of the capitalist spirit and Marx primarily observes the results, the two clearly share some common ideas. While Marx's comments seem more directed at the system rather than its spirit, Weber makes it clear that capitalism could not have flourished without the extraction of Protestant ethics from their source. The original foundation of capitalism, the Protestant "calling," was replaced by the acquisition of money—with detrimental repercussions on modern times.

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